

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

September 13, 1955

Subject: State Department Diplomatic Wireless Service, Amendment of the Communications Act of 1934, to Enable the Granting of Reciprocal Privileges to Foreign Missions to Operate Transmitters here in turn for Operating in Foreign Countries.

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Participants:

Mr. Harold Botkin, ODM, Chairman  
Mr. J. Paul Barringer, State Dept.  
Mr. R. Kreer, State Dept.  
Mr. W. P. Richmond, State Dept. (Paris)  
Mr. T. H. E. Nesbitt, State Dept.  
Mr. Norman Philcox, FBI

Mr. H. W. Brown, State Dept. (Manila)  
Mr. Robert Halliday, State Dept. (Beirut)  
Mr. A. McIntosh, FCC  
Mr. William Plummer, ODM  
Mr. George Larkin, DOD

Copies to:

DC - Mr. Kreer  
TD - Mr. de Wolf  
TRC - Mr. Barringer  
R - Mr. Packard  
R - Mr. Furnas  
E - Mr. Kalijarvi  
H - Mr. Morton  
L/E - Mr. Metzger  
A - Mr. Zook

To take advantage of the presence of the Department's Regional Telecommunications Officers (RTO's), the Department asked Mr. Botkin, Assistant Director of Communications, ODM, to call a meeting of the ad hoc group studying the Department's proposal to establish, on a legal basis, a Diplomatic Wireless Service. Mr. Botkin used as a basis for discussion Deputy Under Secretary Murphy's letter of August 19, 1955, addressed to Dr. Fleming, and the accompanying staff study jointly prepared by State and CIA. After citing some of the problems to be faced, such as frequencies, diminution of revenue to the common carriers and the general security problem, he asked the RTO's if they would elaborate on the problem with respect to their areas.

Mr. Richmond, the RTO for Europe, pointed out that a soft and critical spot in his area of operations centered around French and Italian telegraph administrations where strikes could be called at a moment's notice. He mentioned other cases but these were the most important. Probably the most important use of the diplomatic wireless service in this area would be for communications in the event of an evacuation. Mr. Richmond strongly advocated the establishment of such a service on a legal basis.

Mr. Brown

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Mr. Brown, RTCO with headquarters in Manila, pointed out that while he had a large number of transmitters installed in various Embassies in his area, for the large part they were operating without formal agreement of the countries wherein located and were subject, upon change of the local government or upon cooling of the diplomatic climate, to closure at a moment's notice. He cited Rangoon as a case in point where we were not permitted to operate because of our inability to give reciprocal privileges and, in his opinion, this was a critical area. It was Mr. Brown's estimate that "face" was the important issue in his area since very few of his countries would take advantage of the reciprocal privilege even if granted. Mr. Brown cited one case where local disturbances in Bangkok caused a shutdown of communication facilities for 58 hours during which time the only means of communications for the Embassy and the American press was the quasi-clandestinely operated Embassy transmitter. In conclusion, Mr. Brown said a "diplomatic wireless service was essential to the Department in his area."

Mr. Halliday, RTCO from the Middle East, stated that he had very much the same problems that Mr. Brown had in the Orient. Mr. Halliday cited the case of Egypt where strikes caused the complete disruption of the Egyptian's telegraph services; of Kabul, where the local telegraph office closes down on Friday night and opens on Monday morning; and other instances where the hours of operation of the local PTT's preclude constant communications between the Post and the Department. He also stated that the continuation of a number of our installations were in jeopardy because of the legal restrictions precluding the United States from granting reciprocal rights to foreign countries to operate here.

All three RTCO's voiced the opinion that it was essential to the conduct of the Department's business that we be permitted to grant reciprocal privileges, where necessary, in order to maintain our transmitters abroad.

Mr. Botkin, who spoke sympathetically and favorably of State's position, then called upon Mr. Norman Philcox of the FBI for his views, which in substance were that the granting of such reciprocal privileges and the operation of transmitters here by foreign missions would add to the FBI's burden insofar as domestic security was concerned. Mr. Philcox did not voice a negative agency position other than that of the added security burden to the FBI.

Mr. McIntosh of the FCC expressed sympathy with the Department's objective and offered his assistance in resolving the problem. He stated that there was obviously a frequency problem and then the matter of the type of language to be used in amending the Communications Act. With respect to the frequency problem, he pointed out that the international fixed point-to-point bands were severely congested and that much more loading would cause serious difficulty. It was pointed out to Mr. McIntosh, by a representative of the Department, that one of the conditions that would be imposed upon a foreign mission desiring to operate a transmitter here would be that they would have to select their own frequencies on a non-interference basis with United States operations.

Mr. George

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Mr. George Larkin of the Department of Defense also expressed sympathy with the Department's position and stated that in addition to the problems already mentioned there was a security aspect relating to the NSA operations. It was pointed out to Mr. Larkin that the experience of the British proved that the security aspect in fact did not exist but that the operation of Embassy trans-

In conclusion, Mr. Botkin asked the Department to prepare a staff study, using the paper attached to Secretary Murphy's letter of August 19, if desirable, and put it in proper form for presentation to the Bureau of the Budget. The staff study would include any conditions that the Department may wish to place on the granting of reciprocal privileges such as limitation of power and the location of the transmitter on the mission premises, frequency usage, and would include language for the amendment of the Communications Act. Prior to formal presentation of the proposal to the Bureau of the Budget, Mr. Botkin asked that the Department circulate the staff study informally to the agency representatives present at the meeting in order to obtain the maximum amount of concurrences and then under cover of letter from the Department, transmit it formally to the agencies represented, for their official concurrence or comments. Upon receipt of the agency views, the Department would then transmit those views together with its proposal to the ODM who in the name of the President would send it to the Bureau of the Budget, bearing of course the President's endorsement and request for immediate action. Mr. Botkin further stated that ODM would request that closed hearings be held by the Congress and that the present classification be maintained until the legislation reaches the floor of the Congress.

Upon conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Botkin and Mr. Barringer agreed that in view of the FBI observation, that the amendment of the Act would add to their security burden, it was considered highly desirable that the Under Secretary discuss the matter with Mr. J. Edgar Hoover prior to the time that the Department formally asks the FBI for its views on the Department's proposal.

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